

2001 REGIONAL ADVISORY REPORT

for the

Region 3 Transportation Advisory Committee
(RTAC 3)

Prepared for the
Maine Department of Transportation
By the
Penobscot Valley Council of Governments (PVCOG)
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document outlines the transportation priorities and recommendations of the Region 3 Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC 3) representing Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties. There are seven RTACs statewide that act as public advisory committees to the MDOT. The committees update their Regional Advisory Reports (RAR) every two years so as to reflect evolving regional transportation assets, needs, and deficiencies. The MDOT incorporates these regional priorities when they update the long-range 20-Year Transportation Plan. The RAR considers transportation system priorities and policies rather than specific projects. Specific projects are addressed by MDOT's 6-Year Plan and Biennial Transportation Improvement Plan (BTIP).

The Penobscot Valley Council of Governments (PVCOG) is a regional entity contracted by the MDOT to provide technical assistance and support to RTAC 3. PVCOG held three public meetings throughout the region in order to obtain the public's thoughts and ideas on transportation issues in Region 3. Highlights from those public meetings were provided to the RTAC for their consideration.

The RTAC 3 developed 25 priorities or recommendations under 9 categories representing different transportation issues. RTAC members considered the relative merits of each issue or initiative and then set priorities within each transportation system.

Highway related issues tended to receive the most emphasis from this RTAC, specifically:

- *“Ensure MDOT's current timetable for highway improvements, as outlined in MDOT's Six-Year Plan (all Maine arterials brought up to standard within 10 years; collectors within 20 years), is not extended or eliminated.”*

Other high scoring issues included:

- *“MDOT should pursue changing interstate weight limits so as to be consistent with Maine state highway weight limits.”*
- *“Preserve the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad corridor from Searsport to Northern Maine Junction through Brownville to Meguntic.”*

OVERVIEW

Land Use and Population

Land Use

Comprehensive planning for municipalities is mandated by the State of Maine and many towns have accepted planning grants offered by the State to develop and implement plans. Funds to assist communities to develop plans are scarce. Comprehensive plans are particularly important for a community for two reasons: (1) comprehensive plans provide a “blue print” for a community’s future growth needs including transportation, infrastructure, and land use requirements, and (2) comprehensive plans form the supporting legal basis for local ordinances which are the only measures available to control unlimited highway access (on roads other than arterials), inappropriate land uses, and strip development. In the absence of a comprehensive plan, municipalities may lose their right to implement these measures by certain regulatory means after January 1, 2003.

Major transportation corridors (roads and/or rail lines) typically pass through designated growth areas (growth districts) and/or village areas (existing high density districts with some growth allowed) established by the towns in their comprehensive plans. This is probably due to the fact that a majority of the towns developed around transportation corridors as the region was settled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These are areas which will require prudent planning as population growth places greater demands on the transportation system over the next twenty years.

Access Management

The Maine Legislature passed a law authorizing MDOT to regulate new curb-cuts and driveway entrances along arterial highways. The measure is aimed at preserving the capacity of Maine’s highways and eliminating or at least deferring the need for costly highway improvements necessitated by poorly managed growth. The new law applies only to arterial roadways and considers both safety and capacity issues into design standards.

MDOT has identified several “at-risk” corridors throughout Maine including Route 1A from Brewer to Ellsworth, Route 11/157 from Medway to Millinocket, Route 15 from Bangor to Guilford, Route 7/11 from Newport to Dexter, Route 1A in Hampden, and Route 15 from Brewer to Bucksport. These corridors currently experience traffic congestion and have a driveway related crash rate higher than the 1999 average.

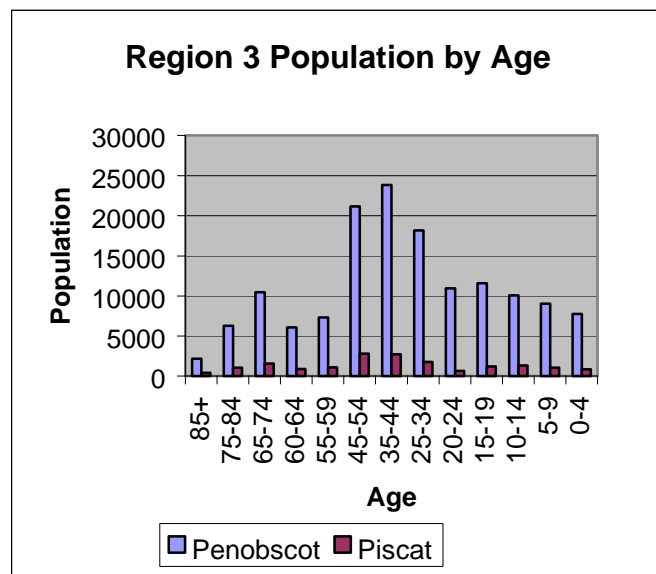
Population Characteristics

Population trends occurring in Region 3 differ from the statewide average. While Maine’s overall population grew approximately four percent between 1990 and 2000, Region 3’s population decreased by two percent. The two counties that make up Region

3, however, did so at different rates. Penobscot County decreased approximately 1.4 percent while Piscataquis County decreased approximately 7.8 percent.

	1990	2000	Change
Penobscot County	146,992	144,919	-1.4%
Piscataquis County	18,713	17,235	-7.8%
Maine	1,227,928	1,274,923	+3.8%

The population of Region 3, like that of the State as a whole, is getting older as the first of the baby boom generation nears retirement age. According to the 2000 Census, Piscataquis County's population was older than that of the State. The median age of Piscataquis County in 2000 was 42 (up from 35.4 in 1990) and that of the State was 38.6. Penobscot County (37.2 years of age) was somewhat younger than the State average.



Highways

Maine's highway network consists of the following Federal Functional Classifications: local roads, principal arterials, minor arterials, and major and minor collectors. Region 3 has about 1,340 miles of local roads, 150 miles of principal arterials, 176 miles of minor arterials, 498 miles of major collectors, and 354 miles of minor collectors. MDOT's 2002-2007 Six Year Plan identifies 41 miles of Region 3 arterial roadways and 519 miles of major and minor collector roadways as backlog and in need of major reconstruction.

In addition to many miles of local roads, private roads also play a role in Region 3's transportation system. Several private logging roads built by Maine's paper companies connect "gateway towns" with the working forests and recreational areas of northern Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties.

Bridges

Three of Maine's Extraordinary Bridges are located in Region 3 (Howland: bridge over Penobscot River, Howland: bridge over Piscataquis River, and Old Town-Milford: bridge over the Penobscot River). Extraordinary Bridges are defined as those bridges with a length of 120 feet or more and an improvement cost of at least \$5 million.

Public Transit

Public Transportation in Region 3 consists of one demand response provider – Project Ride; one fixed route provider – The Bus; and four intercity bus services – Concord Trailways, Vermont Transit, Cyr Bus Lines, and West’s Transportation.

Urban Transit

The fixed route provider “The Bus,” operated by the City of Bangor, serves the cities of Bangor, Brewer, and Old Town, and the towns of Hampden, Orono, and Veazie. The service is fixed route, fixed schedule, six-days a week. The service is limited to the urbanized area, and is supported by a combination of municipal, fare box, state, and federal funds. The demand response provider, Project Ride, operated by Penquis Community Action Program (Penquis CAP), provides one-day-a-week door-to-door van service throughout the urbanized area. Fare box revenue and Penquis CAP funds support the service.

Rural Transit

The demand response provider, Project Ride, provides door-to-door van service in Piscataquis, and rural Penobscot Counties, on weekdays. Apart from in-town service in a few rural towns, each area in the region receives one day a week service, allowing riders to get to Bangor. Fare box revenue, Penquis CAP funds, and federal funds support the service.

Inter-city

Concord Trailways and Vermont Transit, provide daily competing services from Bangor to southern Maine and beyond; West’s Transportation provides daily service to Calais through Hancock and Washington Counties via US Routes 1A and 1; and, Cyr Bus Lines provides Bangor to Caribou service once per day.

Ports and Marine

The MDOT maintains three cargo ports and eight fish piers. Maine's three-port development strategy is underway and includes Eastport, Searsport, and Portland. Completion of the Eastport pier at Estes Head, improvements to the existing port facility at Mack Point at Searsport, and the establishment of container cargo service in Portland indicate the ports are better positioned to serve Maine's overall economy.

Two established marine terminal facilities on Mack Point (Sprague Energy pier and Bangor and Aroostook Railroad pier) provide the focal point for dry cargo traffic in Searsport. The existing Sprague Energy facility handles imported bulk cargos such as salt, coal, dry and liquid chemicals, gypsum, oxide and bauxite. The existing Bangor and Aroostook Railroad (BAR) facility contains a rail siding and offers Searsport its only

present opportunity to handle bulk traffic. The major constraints of the BAR facility include limited storage, transit and loading space, limited berthing, limited truck access, lack of modern cargo handling equipment, and a pier with a load carry capacity unable to support a large crane. Existing BAR railroad lines extend from Searsport to Bangor and offer a unique intermodal opportunity for Region 3 and the rest of Maine.

Railroads

The structure of Maine's rail freight industry is fragmented. Maine is not served directly by any U.S. Class 1 carriers (greater than \$250 million revenue). However, three regional carriers that include Guilford, Bangor and Aroostook System, and Saint Lawrence and Atlantic serve the State as well as two smaller local lines, Maine Coast, and Belfast and Moosehead Lake.

There is no passenger rail service in Region 3. The proposed AMTRAK service will extend from Boston to Portland. The nearest service to Region 3 would be Portland. However, long-term plans include extending the service to Brunswick.

Despite the fragmented nature and general decline in rail traffic since World War II, Maine's rail industry is still critical to the health of Maine's economy. Maine's forest product and paper industries require efficient rail freight service to reach competitive markets with their products and to receive inbound raw materials such as fuels, chemicals, logs, chips, and wood pulp. Rail offers cost advantages compared to truck for the movement of dense or heavy commodities, especially over long distances. Trucks offer service advantages, especially for shorter hauls and smaller or lighter shipments. Rail advantages over trucks, from a public policy perspective, include higher energy efficiency, lower emissions, improved safety, reduced traffic congestion, and less wear and tear on the roads. Intermodal transportation (trailer or container on flat cars) can provide the users with the benefits of both modes; however, it is not presently available in Region 3.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Issues

Bicycle and pedestrian transportation is primarily a recreational pursuit in Region 3 due to the rural, spread out nature of destinations in the region. Many more opportunities exist in the BACTS urban area, however, for residents to commute to work or go shopping via bicycle or walking. Bicycle touring is a growing segment of the tourism industry in both Region 3 and Maine.

The RTAC 3 formed a subcommittee in 2000 to develop a plan for bicycle and shoulder paving priorities for the MDOT. The plan identifies and prioritizes important corridors throughout Region 3 for bicycle transportation and shoulder paving. The MDOT will utilize the subcommittee's recommendations when scheduling these roads for reconstruction or major maintenance activities.

The Calais Branch, an inactive railroad right-of-way owned by the State of Maine, extends from Brewer in Region 3 to Calais in Region 2. MDOT is currently studying several several options for re-use of the corridor.

The East Coast Greenway, a long distance bicycle and pedestrian trail connecting cities from Maine to Florida, passes through Region 3. The majority of the Greenway follows existing roads as it passes through towns east of Bangor before turning southeasterly to Ellsworth. The Calais Branch, if it ever becomes a designated bicycle and pedestrian trail, will be the future location of the East Coast Greewnay.

Air

Airports are critical to the economic health (and development potential) of any geographic region or metropolitan area. Specifically, airports enable efficient transportation of passengers and goods when distances are greater and time is of the essence. Today no geographic region or city of any substantial size can function without access to the international air transportation system.

As distance between two points increase, air transportation becomes more cost efficient. Over short distances, however, air transportation tends to become inefficient. For small propeller aircraft, a distance of less than 100 miles is questionable in terms of cost efficiency. A distance of less than 250 miles is not generally cost efficient for jet aircraft.

Bangor International Airport (BGR) is an essential asset for central, eastern, and northern Maine. BGR offers unusual economic development potential due to its size and scope of operations. General Electric located facilities in Bangor with a view to future expansion that can be accommodated at the airport. Delta Air Lines maintains jet services at the airport in part because of the long-term potential offered by the Bangor region, BGR's ability to accommodate expansion, and the airport's transatlantic potential.

BGR is funded through domestic air traffic, international air traffic, military operations, and industrial and commercial activities. Other funding sources include FAA/Airport Improvement Programs, MDOT matching funding, and Department of Commerce/Tourist Information funding.

Other smaller municipal or regional airports in Region 3 include Dewitt Field (Old Town Municipal), Lincoln Regional, Millinocket Municipal, Greenville Municipal, Charles A. Chase Memorial (Dover-Foxcroft), and Dexter Regional.

Metropolitan Planning Organization

Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System (BACTS) is the federally designated metropolitan planning organization for the greater Bangor area. BACTS is responsible for transportation planning and administration of federal/state transportation funds and programs in the greater Bangor area. The RTAC 3 believes that it is critical for there to

be efficient coordination between BACTS, RTAC 3, and MDOT on transportation planning issues in both Region 3 and the Bangor area.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Planners from the Penobscot Valley Council of Governments (PVCOG) conducted several public meetings throughout Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties to obtain public input on the Regional Advisory Report (RAR). PVCOG attended one meeting of the Moosehead Trail Corridor Committee on June 2001. The Corridor Committee notified their membership and area residents via public meeting announcements. No public input was received at the meeting due to a light attendance. PVCOG also held two public meetings in Glenburn and Lincoln in early July 2001. PVCOG advertised the meetings in the local newspaper and sent notices to all Region 3 towns. There was no public input due to a lack of attendance.

REGION 3 TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

Rail – Freight and Passenger

Overview:

- Currently, there is no passenger rail service in Region 3.
- MDOT owns the Calais Branch, an inactive rail line since 1985, which extends from Brewer to Calais.
- Guilford Transportation operates a rail line that serves International Paper in Bucksport and a rail line serving the James River Mill in Old Town.
- Bangor and Aroostook operates a rail line serving mills in northern Maine via the Bangor area.
- Proposed passenger excursion rail service, based in Greenville, is planned to begin in 2002.
- MDOT is currently conducting an alternative modes study between Bangor International Airport (BGR) and the Trenton area.



Needs/Deficiencies:

- No passenger rail service to Bangor.
- Lack of passenger rail service from Bangor to Trenton (via the Calais Branch) and Greenville.
- MDOT Calais Branch study indicates limited potential for freight rail restoration.
- Calais Branch needs rail connection in Brewer and at Bangor International Airport (BGR) for future excursion, passenger, or freight rail to Trenton and the downeast areas.

RTAC Advice:

- Restore passenger and/or freight rail transportation on the Calais Branch with an intermodal connection to the Bangor area.
- Advocate for the restoration of passenger rail service to Bangor from Augusta (and south).
- Designate a rail corridor Augusta to Bangor.
- Preserve Bangor and Aroostook Railroad corridor from Searsport to Northern Maine Junction through Brownville to Megantic.

Issue: Truck Freight

Overview:

- Routes 1A, 2, 6, 7, 9, 11, 15, 23, and I-95 are major truck routes in Region 3.
- Current weight limits are 100,000 lbs. on state roads and 80,000 lbs. on I-95.
- MDOT has identified heavy haul truck routes.

Needs/Deficiencies:

- Overweight trucks cause significant damage to Region 3 roads.
- Posting of roadway weight limits causes hardship for some Region 3 truck operators.
- Weight limits of 100,000 lbs. on state roads and 80,000 lb. on interstate highways encourages heavy trucks to avoid the interstate resulting in severe damage to state roads.
- Truckers are often forced to seek time consuming alternative routes during the spring thaw in order to avoid posted roads.
- Poor road conditions (rutting, severe crown, short turning radius) inhibit truck movements through out Region 3.



RTAC Advice:

- MDOT should pursue changing interstate weight limits so as to be consistent with Maine state highway weight limits.
- MDOT should increase enforcement of state weight limits.
- Major truck routes should receive priority to repair or reconstruct to 100,000 lb. weight limit through MDOT's Heavy Haul Network program.

Issue: Marine – Ferries and Freight

Overview:

- Limited recreational boating and commercial fishing presence in Region 3.
- Barge traffic has declined in recent years for movement of petroleum products; however, some asphalt products are still delivered via barge to the Bangor area. The Penobscot River needs to be dredged as barges often must carry half-loads because of shoaling in the river.
- Searsport Mack Point port undergoing extensive renovations.

Needs/Deficiencies:

- Lack of a regional, modern, and efficient port facility on the coast.
- Lack of passenger and/or tourist vessels (“coastal cruisers”) along the Penobscot River.

RTAC Advice:

- Perform feasibility study to determine opportunities for coastal commercial and passenger traffic, including the Penobscot River, and development of coastal and river ports.
- Improve rail and truck access to the port at Searsport.

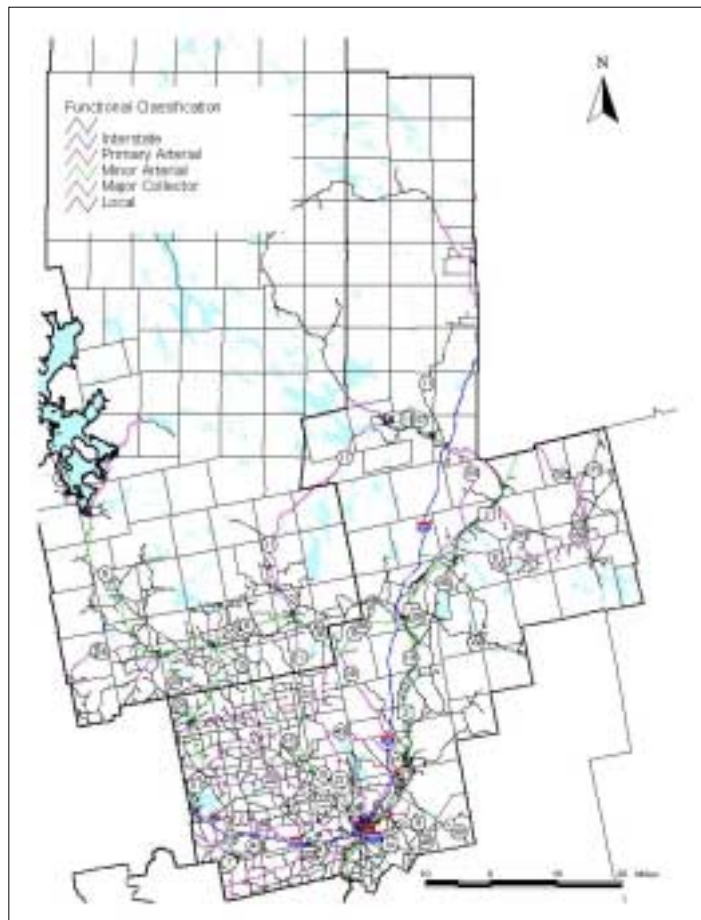
Issue: Highways and Bridges, Maintenance, Major Bridge Projects

Overview:

- Region 3 is largely rural and highly dependent on the single occupancy vehicle.
- Approximately 560 miles of Region 3's arterials (41 miles) and collectors (519 miles) are considered backlog and will require substantial improvements to bring them up to modern standards.
- Three of the Maine's 17 Extraordinary Bridges are located in Region 3 (Howland: bridge over the Penobscot River, Howland: bridge over the Piscataquis River, and the Old Town-Milford bridge) and are in need of improvement or replacement.

Needs/Deficiencies:

- Many of Region 3 roads and bridges are functionally and/or structurally deficient.
- Funding for proper maintenance is inadequate.
- Weight limits are inconsistent with funding available to maintain and repair roads damaged by heavy trucks.
- Roads and bridges need paved shoulders for bicyclists and pedestrians.



RTAC Advice:

- Ensure MDOT's current timetable for highway improvements, as outlined in MDOT's Six Year Plan (all Maine arterials brought up to standard within 10 years; collectors within 20 years), is not extended or eliminated.
- Encourage MDOT examination of road construction methods for preservation of roads carrying heavy trucks (heavy haul routes).
- Examine the relationship between heavy trucks, road damage and the adequacy of user fees.
- Construct passing lanes, where feasible, during reconstruction projects on arterial roadways.
- Maintain MDOT shoulder paving policy.

Issue: Funding

Overview:

- Maine's gas tax is 22 cents per gallon, 2 cents below the New England average.
- Bond financing has been a major source of funding for MDOT over the last 12 years.
- Motor vehicle licenses and fees are the second largest source of contributions to the highway fund.
- MDOT continues to encourage local and/or private partnerships in the funding of certain infrastructure improvements.

Needs/Deficiencies:

- MDOT funding levels are inadequate to maintain and improve the Region 2 highways and bridges.
- Gas tax funds will decline as vehicles become more fuel-efficient.

RTAC Advice:

- Consider tolls to fund new construction projects.
- Protect the integrity of Maine's Highway Fund.
- Increase state gas tax; provided the funds are used exclusively for Maine highway improvements.

Issue: Access Management and Land Use

Overview:

- Commercial and residential development in Region 3 is often concentrated along arterial and collector roadways.
- Local land use regulations, if any, often encourage development immediately along highways.
- Lack of access management controls results in traffic congestion and higher accident rates.

Needs/Deficiencies:

- Lack of local and/or state access management regulations.

RTAC Advice:

- MDOT should seek to strengthen existing access management regulations should the need arise.
- MDOT should work with towns to promote access management along corridors deemed “at-risk.”
- MDOT should seek to integrate access management and corridor planning into the comprehensive planning process.
- MDOT should provide funding and/or assistance to towns in the their access management efforts.
- MDOT should provide public education to motorists as to the proper way to utilize access management assets such as center turn lanes.

Issue: Air Transportation

Overview:

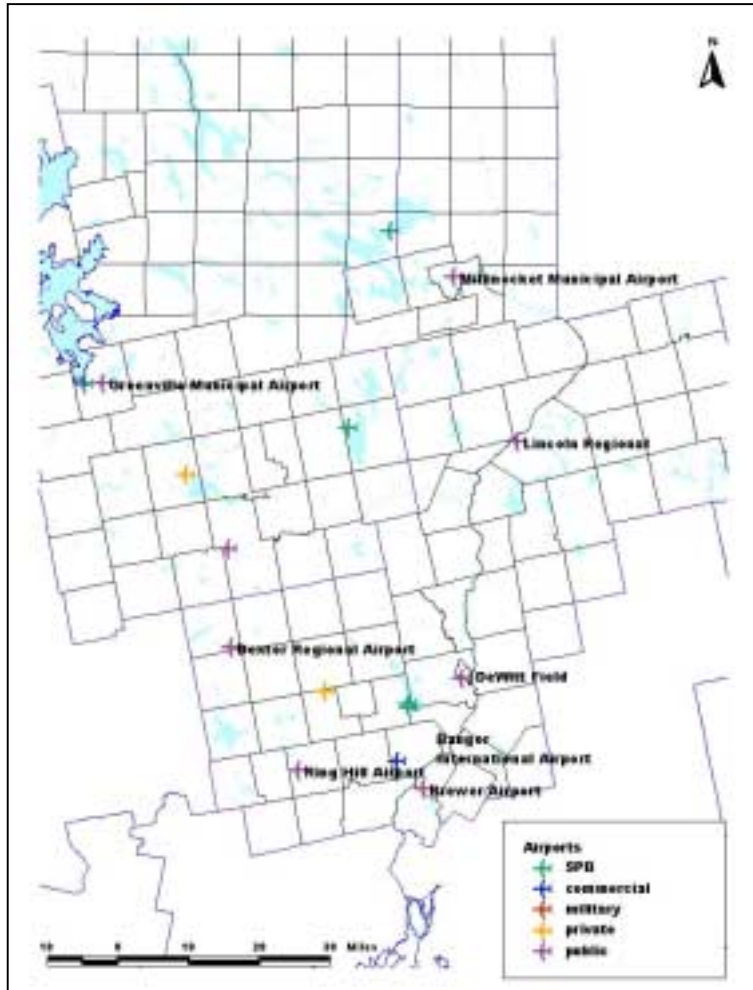
- Bangor International Airport (BGR) offers scheduled air service and general aviation services.
- 420,000 domestic/160,000 international passengers through BGR in 1999.
- 1,150 tons of cargo through BGR in 1999.
- Six municipal or regional airports serving Region 3 located in Old Town, Lincoln, Millinocket, Greenville, Dover-Foxcroft, and Dexter.

Needs/Deficiencies:

- “Leakage” of passengers from BGR to Portland and Manchester, New Hampshire airports.
- Lack of tour operators.

RTAC Advice:

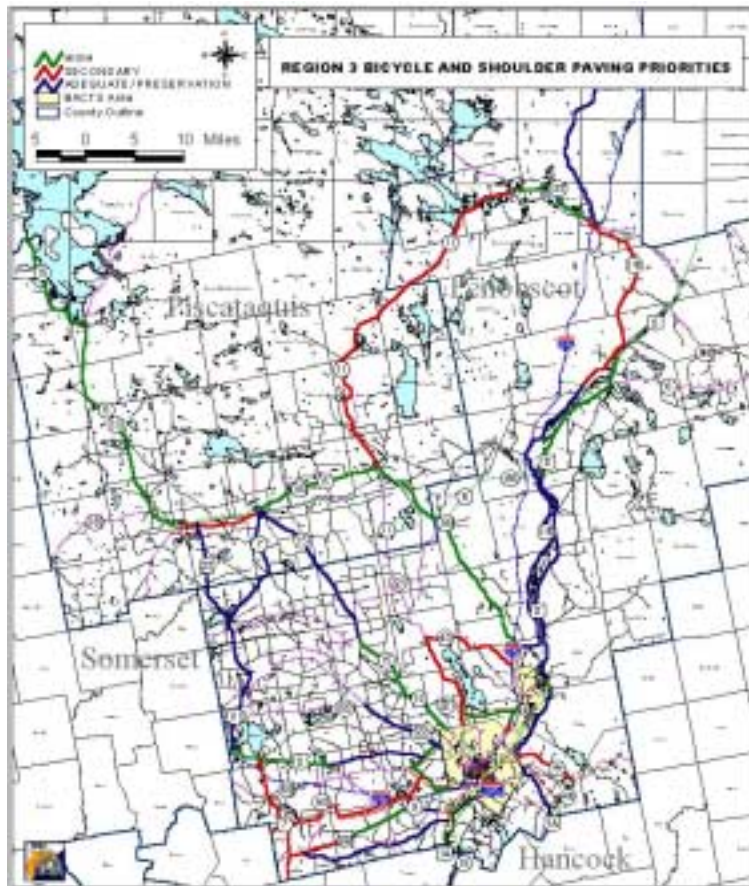
- MDOT and BGR should strengthen intermodal links between BGR and Greenville, Millinocket, and the Trenton areas.



Issue: Bicycles, Pedestrians, and Trails

Overview:

- Limited dedicated bicycle trails in the rural areas of Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties.
- Bike trails exist in urban area of University of Maine in Orono/Old Town.
- The recently designated East Coast Greenway passes through the Bangor area.
- MDOT adopted new shoulder paving policy in 2000.
- Downeast Trail Study indicates good potential for the 130 mile Calais Branch.
- Bicycle tourism is increasing in Maine.
- New MDOT level of service map identifies bike-friendly roads in Maine.



Needs/Deficiencies:

- RTAC 3 Bicycle Sub-committee recommendations for shoulder paving along critical areas need to be constructed.
- Lack of safety education for bicyclists and motorists.

RTAC Advice:

- MDOT should consider paving priorities on roadways identified by RTAC 3 Bicycle Sub-committee.
- Incorporate bike/pedestrian facilities on existing or potential high-use bike/pedestrian crossings of interstates and rivers.

Issue: Intermodal Facilities**Overview:**

- Region 3 is highly dependent on the automobile.
- Bus terminals are located one to three miles from BGR.
- Park-and-ride lots located at interchanges of I-95.
- MDOT is currently studying the feasibility of a passenger (bus/rail/car/air) intermodal facility at BGR.
- MDOT is currently conducting an alternative modes study between BGR and the Trenton area.

Needs/Deficiencies:

- Lack of intermodal passenger facilities.
- Lack of cargo connection between BGR and trucks.

RTAC Advice:

- MDOT to facilitate potential passenger rail or bus transfer points (through providing access) in established downtown areas wherever feasible.

Issue: Transit Services**Overview:**

- Rural population with limited services.
- Aging population that will increase demand for transit services.
- Currently two providers in Region 3: The Bus and Penquis CAP.
- MDOT is currently studying the needs of statewide public transit.

Needs/Deficiencies:

- Lack regularly scheduled service outside of the urban area.
- Funding is inadequate to provide service throughout the urban area.
- Need for extended evening service in the urban area.

RTAC Advice:

- MDOT should allocate funds for providing transit service from suburban areas into and between service centers.

RTAC 3 PRIORITIES FOR REGIONAL ADVISORY REPORT

Below are the results of RTAC 3's voting for specific RAR issues or initiatives. Each RTAC 3 member was allotted 20 votes and assigned the number of votes to the issues or initiatives that they believe are most important to Region 3. Seven RTAC 3 members participated for a total of 140 votes.

Regional Advisory Report – RTAC 3 Advice Ranking

Rail – Freight and Passenger

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 4 | Restore passenger and/or freight rail transportation on the Calais Branch with an Intermodal connection to the Bangor area. |
| 3 | Advocate for the restoration of passenger rail service to Bangor from Augusta (and south). |
| 5 | Designate a rail corridor from Augusta to Bangor. |
| 14 | Preserve the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad corridor from Searsport to Northern Maine Junction through Brownville to Megantic. |

Truck Freight

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 16 | MDOT should pursue changing interstate weight limits so as to be consistent with Maine state highway weight limits. |
| 5 | MDOT should increase enforcement of state weight limits. |
| 3 | Major truck routes should receive priority to repair or reconstruct to 100,000 lb. weight limit through MDOT's Heavy Haul Network program. |

Highways and Bridges, Maintenance, Major Bridge Projects

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 26 | Ensure MDOT's current timetable for highway improvements, as outlined in MDOT's Six-Year Plan (all Maine arterials brought up to standard within 10 years; collectors within 20 years), is not extended or eliminated. |
| 4 | Encourage MDOT examination of road construction methods for preservation of roads carrying heavy trucks (heavy haul routes). |
| 2 | Examine the relationship between heavy trucks, road damage and the adequacy of user fees. |
| 3 | Construct passing lanes, where feasible, during reconstruction projects on arterial roadways. |
| 6 | Maintain MDOT shoulder paving policy. |

Funding

- 1** Consider tolls to fund new construction projects.
- 11** Protect the integrity of Maine's highway fund.
- 2** Increase state gas tax; provided the funds are used exclusively for Maine highway improvements.

Access Management, Land Use and Sprawl

- 3** MDOT should seek to strengthen existing access management regulations should the need arise.
- 2** MDOT should work with towns to promote access management along corridors deemed "at-risk."
- 2** MDOT should seek to integrate access management and corridor planning into the comprehensive planning process.
- 2** MDOT should provide funding and/or assistance to towns in their access management efforts.
- 1** MDOT should provide public education to motorists as to the proper way to utilize access management assets such as center turn lanes.

Air Transportation

- 10** MDOT and BGR should strengthen Intermodal links between BGR and the Greenville, Millinocket, and Trenton areas.

Bicycles, Pedestrians and Trails

- 4** MDOT should consider paving priorities on roadways identified by RTAC 3 Bicycle subcommittee.
- 2** Incorporate bike/pedestrian facilities on existing or potential high-use bike/pedestrian crossings of interstates and rivers.

Intermodal Facilities

- 4** MDOT to facilitate potential passenger rail or bus transfer points (through providing access) in established downtown areas wherever feasible.

Transit Services

- 5** MDOT should allocate funds for providing transit service from suburban areas into and between service centers.

140 Total Votes Cast

